

Rochester Institute of Technology RIT Scholar Works

Articles

9-1999

Deconstructing the Forced Assimilation of Deaf People via De'VIA Resistance and Affirmation Art

Patricia Durr

Rochester Institute of Technology/NTID

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/article>

Recommended Citation

Durr, P. (1999), Deconstructing the Forced Assimilation of Deaf People via De'VIA Resistance and Affirmation Art. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 15: 47–68. doi:10.1525/var.2000.15.2.47

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.

Deconstructing the Forced Assimilation of Deaf People Via De'VIA Resistance and Affirmation Art

Patricia Durr has a BA degree in Sociology from LeMoyne College and a MS in Deaf Education from the University of Rochester and NTID. She has been teaching at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of RIT for the past 10 years. She can be contacted at her email address: PADDHD@RIT.EDU

Historically many outstanding artists who were deaf have contributed to the visual arts, such as: Louis Frisino, Felix Kowalewski, Granville Redmond, Cadwallader Washburn, and Regina Olson Hughes. While these distinguished artists have enhanced the field of art, their work has not focused on the Deaf experience itself. With a heightened appreciation, acceptance, and acknowledgment of Deaf culture and American Sign Language (ASL), we see a virtual explosion of Deaf artists moving away from mainstream art to art that gives voice to their unique cultural experiences. This movement in the United States is known as Deaf View/Image Art (De'VIA). This paper will discuss the historical contexts for a shift in subject matter by North American Deaf artists and the meaning of Deaf View/Image Art. In addition, an analysis of two major Deaf artists and their significant impact on the field of visual art will be presented.

The importance of such politically-charged art is a focus on thematic choices that reflect and represent the shift from a rhetoric of victimization to resistance - a rejection of the "hearingization" of Deaf people:

Deaf people have always lived within other people's worlds. Their local communities are located within larger communities of people who hear and use a different language. What does this mean for Deaf people? How does it show up in the ways Deaf people talk about and explain things? We are now at the problem that Deaf people have of developing and holding an independent understanding of themselves while living in a world surrounded by others who have a different theory about them, in fact, a 'science of deafness.' [Humphries 1991: 232]

This "science," which seeks to restore the Deaf person to hearing society by making them as hearing-like as possible, has long deprived Deaf people of their own voice and self-determination, hence the term hearingization.

DEAF CULTURE AND AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE LITERATURE

Deaf people have long been attracted to professions in the visual arts, such as drawing and painting, graphic design, architecture, and more. As visual learners (since their largest source of input comes through their eyes). Deaf people have been noted for their gifted observatory skills and their desire to communicate their experiences back to the world in a visually accessible manner. For many centuries, American Deaf people have conveyed their history,

culture, and language via American Sign Language (ASL) literature in such signed language forms as ABC and number stories³, jokes, folklore, poetry and storytelling. This visual "oral" tradition, which thrived in Deaf residential school dormitories and Deaf clubrooms, was essential as a keeper of the culture for a group of people in which only 10 percent are born into their parents' culture. The rest must learn aspects of the culture such as beliefs, norms of behavior, language, heritage, and values later in life and usually from their peers.⁴ While ASL literature is a very powerful, breathtaking, and exquisite vehicle for preserving Deaf culture and ASL, to understand ASL literature, one must either be fairly fluent in ASL, utilize a voice interpreter or rely on captions for a translation. As with any form of translation, layers of meaning and importance are often lost when moving from one language and culture to another.

TRANSCENDING THE LINGUISTIC BARRIER

The most accessible ways to transcend this linguistic barrier and pass on the importance of cultural experiences and the language of Deaf people is through the use of visual art. Visual art may be expressed through the medium of paintings, prints, illustrations, sculptures, multimedia, video, and photography. While these art forms may or may not include text, generally they only require that a person interpret the images conveyed in front of them without any particular level of literacy in ASL or English. In the case of Deaf people, while many of us are bilingual, visual art can speak to all people on many levels, and for non-signers it does not require translation from one language to another for them to understand. A striking painting featuring a young girl with big sad eyes wearing an oversized body [hearing] aid will trigger emotions in all people whether they be Deaf ASL users, deaf oral people, hard of hearing as well as hearing.

DISENFRANCHISED PEOPLE'S ART

Before delving into explanations of Deaf View/ Image Art, it is important to understand that many disenfranchised groups communicate their acts of resistance and affirmation via art. Disenfranchised groups can be defined as a group of people who have been deprived of their rights and basic human privileges by those in power. Art takes on important significance in many cultures; especially for disenfranchised groups who have been oppressed in their educational experiences and do not traditionally have full access to tools for disseminating information. The use of murals and other visual art forms to communicate political information in cultures and countries where illiteracy is high illustrates this point. They use their art as a visual testimony of their shared experiences. Visual art serves as a pictorial text for many cultures in which written language is not accessible to the disenfranchised. As bell hooks notes in *Killing Rage*, "[i]t is the telling of our history that enables political self-recovery." (hooks 1995:47)

Some important examples of disenfranchised art movements rest in the Chicano Art Movement, Harlem Renaissance, the Feminist Art Movement, Native American and Deaf View/Image Art. Within each of these movements there are ample examples of how individual artists have been called forth to give witness to a collective consciousness and perception of the other. Here it is important to call attention to the difference between members of a disenfranchised art movement versus individuals who happen to be of the same cultural group or gender. There are some artists who may happen to be African American, Chicano, female or

Deaf who actively choose not to communicate their experiences as a member of that group in their artwork. In fact some become quite incensed if they are categorized as such. While it is important to recognize and respect their preference, assertion, and autonomy, it can lead to a philosophical debate regarding how they can deny the influence of their cultural experiences and identity upon their artwork, regardless of the subject matter.

RESISTANCE AND AFFIRMATION ART

It is essential to recognize the two different categories of art typically utilized by disenfranchised groups - resistance and affirmation art. The expression of resistance art illustrates how disenfranchised group members experience domination by the majority culture, and the art serves as an act of resistance. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson postulates in her book on disability, "[b]ecause representation structures reality, the cultural figures that haunt us often must... be wrestled to the floor before even modest self-determination, let alone political action, can occur" (Thomson 1997:28-29). Frida Kahlo often engaged in resistance art regarding women, cultural identity, and disability. Betye Saars also utilized resistance art in her work when exposing the degradation of African-Americans in the U.S. through her use of stereotypical figures such as Aunt Jemima and other symbols. Deaf Artist, Chuck Baird's "Why me?" artwork depicts the depersonalization and hearingization of Deaf people. Affirmation art involves members of a disenfranchised group celebrating and highlighting the positive aspects of their culture. Georgia O'Keefe's graceful paintings of flowers and still-lifes to represent the beauty and the sexuality of women are notable examples of affirmation art within the Feminist Art Movement. Ann Silver's illustrations utilizing Andy Warhol pop culture style paintings with culturally appropriate labels on crayons for Deaf culture demonstrates affirmation art within Deaf View/Image Art.

ORIGINS OF DE-VIA - DEAF VIEW/IMAGE ART

While most Deaf people do not identify themselves as a disabled group, but rather see themselves as a linguistic, cultural minority, how they are viewed and defined by the other is otherwise. "Disability, then is the attribution of corporeal deviance - not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (Thomson 1997: 6). The art of Deaf people is an iconography of universals and commonalties experienced by Deaf people as they struggle to articulate their definition of self with each other and the outside world. In the case of Deaf View/ Image Art, we have seen a debate unfold in the questions of whose art should be considered to be Deaf View/Image Art, and who will be the judge? As pointed out by Deaf artist and activist, Dr. Betty Miller in her 1989 paper on Deaf View/Image Art for the Deaf Way conference proceedings:

Some Deaf artists feel that visual art can be a 'way of life' among Deaf people and a part of Deaf culture in the same manner that music is a way of life among the hearing society. Visual art can enlighten Deaf and hearing observers by presenting experiences reflective of a Deaf person's world view. This, in turn, can strengthen a Deaf observer's sense of identity within the Deaf culture. (Miller 1989: 770)

De'VIA then must examine "hearingness" as a political cultural construct. It recognizes how the invisibility of "hearingness" allows for the colonization of the norms of being Deaf. Miller goes on to ask:

Is there such a thing as Deaf Art? The works of emerging Deaf artists seem to show evidence of experiences that represent facets in the lives and expressions of the millions of Deaf individuals who live in the United States. Many characteristics seem to be born out of a common Deaf experience, whether this be growing up in a world of muffled, indistinct sounds or one that involves communicating with visual rather than auditory symbols. And finally, there are the political and cultural visual statements that are expressed in the works of certain Deaf artists. These characteristics need to be explored and examined. (Miller 1989: 771)

To better understand Deaf View/Image Art in the context of a disenfranchised art movement, it is critical to have an understanding of its history and inception. As with many art forms and movements, works of Deaf View/Image Art were being created long before it was ever given a name. Dr. Miller is often cited as one of the first public Deaf artists who clearly incorporated Deaf themes into her artwork, although many speculate that Goya and other less well-known artists created Deaf View/Image long before this movement was identified (Sonnenstrahl 1996: 132). Most likely Deaf people have been creating artwork that depicts and reflects their unique experience long before the 1970s; however, because this era was a time of raising Deaf awareness, Deaf power, mass communication and empowerment. Dr. Miller has been honored with the title "mother of Deaf View/Image Art."

Miller merits this title because of the type of work featured in her first exhibit, and the responses it inspired:

The reactions from the viewers who saw my show in 1972 who were not only hearing but Deaf as well. They were very upset with my artwork. The Deaf people were angry with me about my implications, although they knew that the exhibit was expressing the truth. It was during a time of strong denial for deaf people. Many were professionals who work at Gallaudet University, plus some from outside the campus. ... A few hearing people from outside, who had no real knowledge about deafness still somehow understood. Especially those who understood oppression. ...It was not really until the early '80s when ASL became more accepted, and the Deaf culture became more acceptable did my artwork gain acceptance. (Miller personal communication 2000)



Fig. 1. *Bell School, 1944. Betty G. Miller.*

Dr. Miller's works such as "Ameslan Prohibited" and "Bell School, 1944", with their graphic illustrations of the oppression of American Sign Language (ASL) and victimization / puppetization of deaf children at the expense of oralism offended many people. Deaf people were worried about how it might offend hearing teachers of the Deaf (this being a strong example of internalized oppression) and hearing professionals felt this challenged their benevolent / paternalistic attempts to restore Deaf people to hearing society.

I started my artwork after I became sober... but because many of my artwork pieces are so provoking and so ahead of our time regarding deafness and oppression that I stopped painting and drawing until for the next ten years... sigh... In my process of recovery, I could not deal with many angry and upsetting reactions to my artwork, as I had to deal and cope with my own anger and other emotions in my process of recovery. I honestly felt that those pieces of work had really helped me through the process" (Miller personal communication 2000).

As Deaf artist and art professor Deborah Sonnenstrahl speculates:

When a deaf person views Miller's work, he or she meets the actualities of his or her deafness face to face. Her art does not camouflage or soften the perils she experienced during her growing years. She has received criticism as a "negative" artist by those who found her style too raw to absorb or who perhaps preferred to forget the realities of deafness. They possibly did not want to be reminded of our hand-slapping incidents while students at oral-oriented schools for Deaf students. Perhaps, they did not want to be reminded of these heavy hearing-aid sets they were required to wear during class hours. Perhaps, they did not want to be reminded of those endless hours of speech therapy with a tongue depressor forced down in their throats" (Sonnenstrahl 1996: 133)

When a Deaf artists' community in Austin, Texas was founded called Spectrum: Focus on Deaf Artists' Summer Festivals in 1977 and 1978, Miller finally had a forum in which to discuss what "Deaf art" was or should be with other Deaf artists. It was here that the conundrum of the philosophical debates were waged concerning classifications such as what is it, who creates it, and mediums used. The Spectrum environment was essential for laying the groundwork to establish the concepts and terminology for this genre Deaf art.

It was not until 1989, almost 10 years after the Spectrum group convened and almost two decades after Dr. Miller first exhibited her work, that Deaf art was given a name. Shortly before the landmark first international Deaf Way conference and festival in Washington, DC, a group of Deaf artists

...worked, argued, debated, considered, collaborated, and finally came to an agreement on the formal elements and characteristics of De'VIA, which is an acronym for Deaf View Image Art. This choice evolved out of much discussion on the relative merits of an English or an ASL name. De'VIA reflects a combination of the two, with the natural flow of ASL, as the predominate consideration," writes Nancy Creighton, the wordsmith of the group. The signs are as follow in sequence: deaf-blow up (visual image)-art. Alternatively, it has been signed deaf-view (sign deaf-then 'see from eyes to hand-shape of image')- art. The hand-shape that represents the painting is the 'image.' The sign for De'VIA embodies the Deaf characteristics or elements in art" (Sonnenstrahl 1996: 132).

Dr. Betty Miller, Dr. Paul Johnston, Dr. Deborah Sonnestrahl, Chuck Baird, Guy Wonder, Alex Wilhite, Sandi Inches-Vasnick, Nancy Creighton, and Lai-Yok Ho were the nine Deaf pioneers who coined the term Deaf View/Image Art and wrote a manifesto defining and describing it. While it is very unusual for a group of artists to come together to define and name their own genre, it is not unheard of for disenfranchised groups to do so.

While this may appear to give less credence to the movement, it is important to acknowledge the lack of interest and scholarship in this field by art critics and historians. Susan Dupor, a Deaf artist, shares her discontentment with this slight when saying:

I feel unfortunate that the Deaf Art has not receiver any attention in the mainstreamed art world. Many minority arts such as Latino, African-American, Gay and Lesbian and feminist art are gaining their respects but Deaf Art is largely neglected. Maybe there are not enough powerful sponsors for Deaf artists or maybe art critics believe their works are premature or critical that Deaf Art lack aesthetics or definition? (Dupor personal communication 1998).

The term has its critics as seen in the thumbs down section of the Deaf newspaper, *Newswaves* :

Thumbs down to the tiresome and pretentious expression "De'VIA," used to describe artwork that conveys deaf themes. Its originator, Betty Miller, said in a recent Deaf-Digest report, "one should not use De'VLA unless it is necessary, as it is an abbreviation of Deaf View/Image Art." How about not using it at all? Just call it what it is. Deaf Art, and forget the gussied-up, pseudo-French words, especially if you want to be understood and respected by the hearing world (Newswaves 15 March 2000: 8).

Miller explained the distinction between Deaf Art and Deaf View/Image Art in her 1989 presentation at the Deaf Way conference:

The term "De'VIA shows more respect for the artist, because De'VIA is INTENTIONALLY created to express that aspect of the artist's life. As any artist knows, unintentional aspects always show up in the artwork, our lives influence and inform all of our work. But an artist should have the right to decide for themselves if their work is an example of De'VIA work or not. Of course, all art is based on the experience of the artist. In the case of Deaf artists, their cultural and physical experiences as Deaf people inform and influence all of their work. De'VIA, however, is created when the artist intentionally draws to the criticism of De'VIA as a technical term and the greater popularity of Deaf Art... Deaf Art is a term that is more accessible to the average person. Which is probably why it is more popular. But... it's simplistic and open to a lot of vagueness and misinterpretation. De'VIA is an acronym for Deaf View/Image Art, and the key here is "deaf view" — the artist's view of deafness. I think most of the people who object simply never took the time to learn or to understand artists on those life experiences (to tell their story or express their feelings) (Miller et al, 1989).

The abbreviation itself is an act of resistance by trying to create a totally new term that would reflect the meaning in the spirit of ASL rather than in English, the language of the dominant

culture. This sets the tone for what De'VIA is about - bringing the hearing paradigm of deafness under the Deaf artist's gaze. Hence, this tiny, unique term was created to shatter the political cultural construct of deafness by the "other" and signified a shift in artistic consciousness from object to subject.

Deaf people have long struggled with how to capture ASL concepts and ideologies into a written / spoken form. Often you will see major historical movements, events, organizations or groups naming themselves in English first and then originating a sign based on the English name or using an acronym. It is rare for a naming to take place in ASL first and then to have English follow. It seems fitting that a visually based expression to describe a concept born of a specialized visual art would seek to preserve its uniqueness and abstractness. Deaf View/Image Art may evolve into a new term over time, but the importance of its origin and distinction should be honored.

THE DE'VIA MANIFESTO AND SOME OF THE ARTISTS

The assertions and defining principles and characteristics of Deaf View/Image Art are important to understand, explore, and critique. The manifesto, which was drafted by the original eight Deaf artists, may be lacking in some areas, yet is still revolutionary to the field of art.

De'VIA represents Deaf artists and perceptions based on their Deaf experiences. It uses formal art elements with the intention of expressing innate cultural or physical Deaf experience. These experiences may include Deaf metaphors, Deaf perspectives, and Deaf insight in relationship with the environment (both the natural world, and Deaf cultural environment), spiritual and everyday life.

De'VIA can be identified by formal elements such as Deaf artists' possible tendency to use contrasting colors and values, intense colors, contrasting textures. It may also most often include a centralized focus, with exaggeration or emphasis on facial features, especially eyes, mouths, ears, and hands. Currently, Deaf artists tend to work in human scale with these exaggerations, and not exaggerate the space around these elements.

There is a difference between Deaf artists and De'VIA. Deaf artists are those who use art in any form, media or subject matter, and who are held to the same artistic standards as other artists. De'VIA is created when the artist intends to express their Deaf experience through visual art. De'VIA may also be created by deafened or hearing artists, if the intention is to create work that is born of their Deaf experience (a possible example would be a hearing child of Deaf parents). It is clearly possible for Deaf artists not to work in the area of De'VIA.

While applied and decorative arts may also use the qualities of De'VIA (high contrast, centralized focus, exaggeration of specific features), this manifesto is specifically written to cover the traditional fields of visual fine arts (painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, printmaking) as well as alternative media when used as fine art, such as fiber arts, ceramics, neon, and collage (Miller 1989: 772).

To better illustrate what Deaf View/Image Art is about and how it impacts upon Deaf and

hearing culture, the artwork of two Deaf artists will be explored and compared. It is essential to note that there are many more outstanding Deaf artists who have been and are now beginning to create art utilizing motifs and themes to reflect on and explore the Deaf experience. Within the past two decades many more Deaf artists such as Paul Johnston, Chuck Baird, Mary Thomley, Robin Taylor, Irene Bartok, Thad Martin, Joan Popovich-Kutsher, Ann Silver, and Ethan Sinnott, and the deceased Harry Williams and Lee Ivey have been generating in this genre. Without question, gallery exhibits at Deaf Studies conferences and the National Touring Exhibit of Deaf Culture Art and web page spear-headed by Brenda Schertz have played a vital role in this growth of interest and support for Deaf View/Image Art. With the acceptance of ASL, the promotion and recognition of Deaf culture and empowerment through Deaf Studies programs, and the 1988 Deaf President Now movement, 5 Deaf people's attitudes shifted from the oppressive days of Dr. Miller's initial exhibit where politicized art was shunned to a desire to know, understand, see and create art that gives voice to the Deaf experience.

SOME BACKGROUND ON MILLER AND DUPOR

Before exploring the two Deaf View/Image Art works of Dr. Betty G. Miller and Susan Dupor, some background information is in order. Dr. Miller was born in 1934, and although she had Deaf parents, she was sent to Bell School, an oral day school in Chicago. In that time period it was typical for Deaf people to internalize the values of the external dominant culture. The ability to speak was equated with intelligence level. It was thought that the better one could speak, the better she or he could think and succeed. Later, she went on to attend public schools. It was not until Miller entered Gallaudet College (now University) that she recognized the richness of ASL and Deaf culture.

Gallaudet was a shock for her, culturally, despite the fact that she had Deaf parents who used sign language during her entire childhood. Growing up, Betty viewed herself as a "hearing person," and the only Deaf people she saw were her parents and their friends. She didn't make the connection between those Deaf people and herself, and didn't make that connection until she came to Gallaudet and saw Deaf people who belonged to her age group, members of her own generation" (Listisard 1997: 25).

The daughter of a Deaf commercial artist, Miller has a BA degree from Gallaudet College, MFA from Maryland Institute, College of Arts, and an Ed. D. from Pennsylvania State University. "Among her influences she cites her father, the Deaf artist Ralph R. Miller, Sr.; one of her professors at Pennsylvania State University; and Nancy Creighton." (Schertz 1995: 7). Miller is an author, teacher, counselor, and artist. She has created works of art in ink and paint illustrations with and without typography, multimedia sculptures, and neon glass.

Conversely, Susan Dupor was born in 1969 and attended self-contained classroom and mainstream programs in Wisconsin throughout her childhood. Despite having a hard of hearing brother, she did not know or utilize ASL until much later. In contrast to Miller being raised in an ASL home and oral school, Dupor learned Signed English [an artificial form of combining signing with English words and grammatical word order] from watching her sign language interpreter and teachers of the deaf. She at times felt isolated and escaped into her world of art.

Dupor says, "My deafness has been a great impact on my development of art. I have told people if I were hearing, I probably would be playing music! I was drawn to art because it was kind of like my best friend in grade school. I was educated in a mainstream setting plus I was shy with hearing people. Art filled in the void when I felt alienated. Showing my ability to create art was a way to gain acceptance and break down communication barriers with hearing people. Fine art is an outlet to gain empowerment of oneself." Dupor recalled when she was in second grade, "I declared in front of my class that I wanted to grow up to be an illustrator. Today, my artwork is narrative, which is very much an illustration concept" (Dupor personal communication 1998).

As with Miller, it was not until Dupor entered college at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, NY (NTID) that she first embraced ASL and Deaf culture. For Deaf people who have been socialized to be hearing and are introduced to the whole world of Deaf culture and language for the first time, this can be a startling awakening. Knowing that she wanted to be an artist and wanting more specialized training, Dupor transferred to the School of Art Institute of Chicago and immediately began creating artwork with the Deaf themes that have informed her work since.

Dupor has a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MS in Deaf Education from the University of Rochester and NTID. "Deaf history, culture and education has become an everlasting source of inspiration for my artwork. Many artists inspire me and I am especially interested in the American Social Realism painters of the Great Depression era. They emphasize a lot on social issues which is similar to my goals in my art," states Dupor. (Schertz 1995: 5) She also shares, "I'm immensely drawn to Frida Kahlo's surrealism paintings because she is so bold and disturbing and explores issues of cultural identity." (Dupor personal communication 2000) Dupor is an art teacher at a Deaf school and an artist. Her works of art have taken the form of animation, paintings, paintings with textiles, and multimedia.

While Miller and Dupor are a generation apart in age, their themes, motifs, focus, and experiences are strikingly similar.

I see some similarities with Miller's works with mine... Both of us look back at our education, analyze it, figure out how it can be improved by showing people how it felt to be a deaf child. Many deaf children could not speak for themselves, they were not taught to analyze and criticize about their education. Then by the time they have grown up, it was too late, some have suffered from it in different degrees in the long run. I am not saying my total communication-mainstreaming education was disastrous (on a social peer level it was an awkward experience for me), but I can see it was not effective for some of my classmates in different realms. I am sure Betty feels that way with oralism" (Dupor personal communication 2000).

Such conjunctions have led this author and others to conclude that there are commonalities of the Deaf experience whether or not one comes from a Deaf or hearing family, was raised orally, with Signed English or ASL, went to a Deaf school or was mainstreamed.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE GAZE OF MILLER AND DUPOR

When doing a thematic analysis of Miller's and Dupor's resistance and affirmation Deaf View/Image Art, it is startling to see so many similarities. This is especially surprising when we consider that the two women were raised in completely different eras in the U.S. and taught using very different educational methodologies. Furthermore, they had not met each other until 1998, nor studied one another's work. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997) compellingly argues it is through the expression of a disabled woman's gaze that otherness examined as apolitical cultural construct may be critically examined. The expression of such a gaze also allows for the movement from victimization to activism through constructive rage and celebration. Resistance and affirmation are the ying and the yang of Miller and Dupor's works. As Dupor states, "there were moments when I vented my emotions, and others when I wanted to celebrate the uniqueness of Deaf culture and seek the ironies of being Deaf in a hearing world" (Schertz 1999: 7). Comparing and contrasting thematic points of congruence in their work becomes a way, then, to look for universals of the Deaf experience.

MILLER AND DUPOR'S RESISTANCE ART: RECORD OF PAST INJUSTICES

Miller's and Dupor's two most comparable works were created 20 years apart, yet both depict class photos to illustrate the effect of Deaf education on children. In the case of Miller, it was at the oral Bell School in Chicago. For Dupor it was within self-contained hearing impaired classrooms in public schools in Wisconsin, both worlds and decades apart. Yet Miller's "Bell School, 1944" and Dupor's "Interesting Hamster" have a striking resemblance. Miller's work is an illustration of four students in the back row and three students in the front. Each student's mouth has lines down the side as if a puppet. Their eyes are nonexistent, and their hands are oversized, bulky, and awkwardly placed. Immediately upon seeing this, Deaf people who have experienced an oral education or speech therapy, say that they identify with that feeling of being trained to be a puppet-to say the word "just this way." The hands are made to seem like foreign objects that are useless and, in fact, dangerous. The source of this depiction is clear to many aware viewers, because punishment for signing was common in aural/ oral programs. It also illustrates how children of disenfranchised groups are taught to feel that what is inherent to them is abnormal, bad or evil.

As Miller shares, "much of my work depicts the Deaf experience expressed in the most appropriate form of communication: visual art. I present the suppression of Deaf Culture and American Sign Language as I see it... This oppression of Deaf people by hearing is actually cultural, educational, and political (Schertz 1995: 7).



Fig. 2. *I Interesting Hamster*, Susan Dupor.

Similarly, Dupor's "I Interesting Hamster" features a school class photo of four students in the back row and three in front. In addition, there is one very large teacher on either side of the group. The children in this colorful painting are shown in profile with just the insides of their mouths and ears indicated. This illustrates what is known in Deaf cultural discourse as the "pathological" view of Deaf people within the educational system and dominant culture generally. From this perspective, being Deaf is a deviant characteristic, and the system must do everything it can to socialize young deaf children into that view by dissociating them from a Deaf-centered one that values signed languages, visual traditions such as ASL storytelling, and culturally Deaf people. Social practices that arise from a perspective in which deafness is seen only as a pathology of the ear involve an emphasis using any residual hearing via hearing aids and intensive speech therapy.

The children in Dupor's class have no eyes, and, while the teachers have clear exterior facial features (indicating they are normal / hearing), their eyes are smudged and muted. I interpret that to express how the teachers were not visually attuned and did not understand anything visually communicated to them by the children, only that via an auditory mode. In the middle of the first row of children is a sign saying "Hearing impaired." Thus, what the child cannot do—hear normally—becomes her or his defining characteristic. The work is also a social commentary on what Harlan Lane refers to as "forced assimilation" when talking of mainstreaming in his book *Mask of Benevolence*. In each of the corners of this picture is a little hamster, hence, the name of the piece: "I Interesting Hamster."

As the artist, Dupor, shares, "I Interesting the Hamster" is a painting that reflects the self-contained classes for deaf and hard of hearing children in hearing schools. This was a very common practice in the seventies but nowadays more students are being mainstreamed in the hearing classrooms. Self-contained classes still exist, sometimes deaf students are placed with hearing children with other disabilities.

The hamster in glass cages are a metaphor to self contained classes. Students have no control of their life, they are determined how to be taught and raised, their interaction with hearing peers are limited. Mainstreamed public schools like to show off their unique programs for deaf and hard of hearing children, people come look at the self contained rooms, like children looking at hamsters in glass cages which is a big deal in their classrooms. Mainstreamed school think they get the big credit for this, but do we know the deaf and hard of hearing

children are comfortable, happy and getting quality education? Who evaluates this? Hearing administrations? What do they know is a quality Deaf Education program? Cute furry critters! (Dupor personal communication 2000).

PATHOLOGIZING THE PATHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

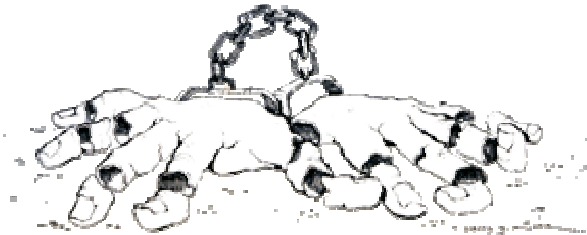


Fig. 3. *Ameslan Prohibited*, Betty G. Miller.

One of Miller's most well known works—"Ameslan Prohibited"—is an illustration of two large hands in chains with the fingers severed at the knuckles. Looking like a political cartoon, it certainly makes a political statement. The work calls the viewer to recognize the oppression of Ameslan (an earlier combined name for American Sign Language, now shortened to ASL). While schools for the Deaf in the U.S. had originally been founded in the early 1800s by many Deaf leaders and utilized sign language for instructional purposes, by the end of the century things shifted in Euro-American deaf education with the influence of Alexander Graham Bell. Bell considered himself primarily as a speech teacher and was a staunch supporter of an oral only education (his invention of the telephone was a byproduct of his work with the Deaf). He felt that sign language was an abomination and a crutch for Deaf people. In his 1883 paper to the Philosophical Society of Washington, Bell states:

Nature has been kind to the deaf child, man cruel. Nature has inflicted upon the deaf child but one defect — imperfect hearing; man's neglect has made him dumb and forced him to invent a language which has separated him from the hearing world. Let us, then remove the afflictions that we ourselves have caused... let us banish sign language from our schools. If—it is our object to destroy the barriers that separate them from the outside world and take away the isolation of their lives, then I hold that our energies should be devoted to the acquisition of the English language as a vernacular in its spoken and written forms. With such an object in view we should bring the deaf together as little as possible and only for the purpose of instruction. After school hours we should separate the deaf children from one another to prevent the development of a special language and scatter them among hearing children and their friends in the outside world (Bell 1883: 76-77).

The oralist philosophy of using only spoken communication gained ascendance over signed language, a situation that lasted well into the 1970s in the U.S. At that time, the failure of the oralist philosophy resulted in sign language slowly being allowed back into the classroom, yet not in the form of ASL, but in a systematic codified form of representing English (Signed English).

Miller's artwork is a strong testimony of the abuses of an oral-only education. The chained hands and broken fingers show the mutilation and enslavement of a deaf person. Oral schools often utilized punishment as a way to coerce children into not doing what came naturally to them, that is, to communicate using a visual-gestural language. Hands were tied up, fingers were rapped hard with yardsticks, and children were forced to hold stacks of books on their outstretched arms while kneeling.

A deeper meaning in Miller's work is illustrated by the chains at the wrist of these innocent-looking pair of hands. Often oral educators preached and published against the use of ASL, arguing that it would serve as a crutch for deaf people and deny them the opportunity to reach, or prevent them from reaching, their proper place in society. The argument was that signing would make them disabled and handicapped. Miller's work turns that perspective upside-down. From the Deaf-centered perspective it is the oral only approach that places a Deaf person in a handicapping condition, crippling and enslaving her or him. Thus, she exposes the pathology of how Deaf people were treated: pathologizing the pathology model of an oral only education. Instead of showing how Deaf children are viewed in a pathological / pathetic manner as is done in "Bell School, 1944," she turns the table to show how denying a Deaf person's natural language is a pathological practice. The irony of this inversion is not lost on those who shared this experience. As Lane states, "[e]ducation conducted in a way that negates the child's identity, fails to use his language, and isolates him from peers is disabling." [Lane 1992: 84]



Fig. 4. *Implantation Lot*, Susan Dupor.

Similarly, Dupor's "Implantation Lot" focuses upon the exposure of oppressive practices by those with the power to suppress deaf signed and cultural traditions. At a quick glance, this colorful painting looks playful and happy, while further examination reveals layers of meaning and commentary. The work features a toddler wearing a red and white polka-dotted hospital gown encircled by various animals commonly featured in fables and nursery rhymes. Each cheerful and kind-looking animal wears a lab coat, stethoscope and other medical paraphernalia. The laughing child and animal entourage are standing in a parking lot as indicated by a few yellow lines and cracked tar where weeds and grass pop through.

Although there is nothing overly-menacing in the picture, the child's shaved head with his or her long half-moon scar behind the ear certainly doesn't seem right to the viewer. It disturbs, as this is such an unnatural image. Yet, the medical profession argues quite effectively, and sometimes effortlessly, to hearing parents that this is the most normal course of action for them to take for their profoundly deaf child – the surgical implantation of a cochlear implant device in their skull. The argument by doctors for the implant turns upon an appeal and a

gloss of complexity as if to say: "we have the technological capabilities to restore your child to society. Would you deprive them of this?" As Lane puts it, "[t]he more we view the child born deaf as tragically infirm, the more we see his plight as desperate, the more we are prepared to conduct surgery to unproven benefit and unassessed risk. Our representation of deaf people determines the outcome of our ethical judgment." [Lane 1992: 238]

Dupor's bright colors, playful images, in a parking lot give the viewer the feeling of people at a fast food restaurant parking, easily pulling in and out. Yet, in this short hospital visit, a child is altered forever, profoundly, quickly. She succeeds in calling into question this pathological view of the Deaf child and raises another: whose actions are really pathological and in need of repair like this cracking parking lot? Dupor does leave us with a hopeful symbol in this work by having the grass peek through the concrete, offering an image that natural elements will persevere and defeat this controversial and invasive medical intervention.

SOCIAL ALIENATION

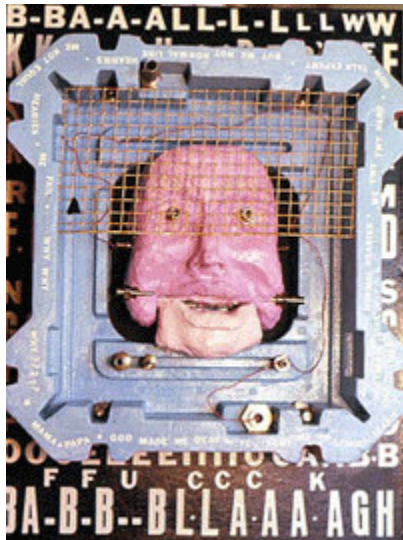


Fig. 5. *Untitled*, Betty G. Miller.

In Miller's untitled multimedia piece featuring a face of clay with a wire grid across the eyes and a metal rod through the mouth, emotions of abuse, torture, and mistreatment are clearly communicated. As with many of Miller's works, printed text serves as a border and background. In this piece she states: "Mama, Papa, God made Deaf. You want me talk, talk, talk. Me fail..." The text conveys a feeling of isolation, stigmatization, and alienation. It is as if the child is trying to teach the parents/society to reframe deafness as one of G-d's designs, too. By having the eyes look out through a grid, the artist signifies the imprisoned state of the subject and the inability to have full and equal access to the world. The metal rod through the mouth gives a puppet-like appearance that also illustrates the oppression of voice, being forced to speak and artificial constraints to try to change or alter the subject in inhumane ways. The background text is a series of white words on black background, such as B* BA*A*ALL'L*LLLWW. For many Deaf viewers this will trigger memories of speech therapy sessions where we were drilled to repeat words again and again, sounding out each letter in an unnatural and methodical manner. At the bottom the word FF U CCC K appears before the text continues with another B word to practice. The profanity exemplifies the subject's

frustration and feelings of entrapment. The lack of any dots in between each letter and the word being smaller in size than the others may indicate a more natural outburst of the word, an unrestricted mental vocalization.



Fig. 6. *Family Dog, Susan Dupor.*

In Dupor's well-known work, "Family Dog," the painter prominently displays the social alienation experienced by a Deaf child in a family that does not sign. Here we see a young girl lying on the floor in a posture much like that of a dog. Behind her is a yellow coffee table that looks like a yellow guard-rail fencing in the family pet, this child, from the rest of the unit. The family is represented by six people who face one another and away from the deaf child's visual field, chatting in a way that renders hopeless any attempt by the child to lipread. Outlines of their eyes and teeth are indicated, but the rest of their facial expressions are a total blur. The child's face is complete with wide, alert eyes and an outstretched tongue as if panting and begging. Many of us coming from very loving and accepting homes can still identify with this bold painting, as this feeling of social alienation due to communication barriers, access issues and lack of affiliation can be stigmatizing.

"Most disabled people are surrounded by nondisabled families and communities in which disabilities are unanticipated and almost always perceived as calamitous. Unlike the ethnically-grouped, but more like gays and lesbians, disabled people are sometimes fundamentally isolated from each other, existing often as aliens within their social units" (Thomson 1997: 15). While this sense of isolation is notably less for Deaf people who come from a Deaf family and/or attended a Deaf school or large program where sign language was utilized, all can still identify with this painting in their own life among 'others' at home or at work.

Much like Miller's original work, this painting created quite a stir when first exhibited at a Deaf Studies conference in 1995. Easily interpreted by Deaf viewers, it makes people uncomfortable in its bluntness and its rage. Even Miller was surprised by Dupor's direct message. Miller is quoted as having said, "Buy it? No, thanks!" - shaking her head - "Too powerful for me! I thought I was bad, but she's much more powerful!" she exclaims. "If that painting had been done during my time, people would DIE!" (Listisard May 1997:29,31).

Ms. Dupor states that throughout her childhood, creative art served to help her deal with the lack of genuine socialization that accompanied her mainstreamed education.

My emotions and experience growing up Deaf are seen and felt in most of my pieces. Today, constant exposure of the Deaf culture at NTID is an ongoing inspiration to create new paintings with Deaf themes. Creating any art form is truly therapeutic. At times when I was a

sprouting adult, I was often frustrated to discover the inequality and condescension of the hearing society and would vent those feelings in my artwork. There are times that I desire to show the audience that others and I had pride in being Deaf by expressing those feelings through art that there is nothing wrong with being non-hearing.

In deaf history, deaf people have often been deprived of direct communication with hearing people and I feel I have subconsciously attempted to get my messages across to various audiences quicker through figurative art (Schertz 1995: 5).

OTHERNESS AND MARGINALITY



Fig. 7. *Suppression of the Body*, Betty G. Miller.

The issue of identity (crisis and formation) is expressed in many De'VIA artists' works. This concept is undoubtedly a significant theme for Miller and Dupor. Psychotherapist Neil Glickman has delineated a Deaf Identity Development theory, describing a continuum of psychological development for many Deaf people through four levels of being: hearing centered, marginal, immersed in Deaf culture, and bicultural.⁶ Miller's work "Suppression" exemplifies the two middle stages. In this piece we see an ink illustration of a young woman holding her hand up to her face as if to sign MIRROR with a duplicate image on the left. The middle image features a reflection of these portraits showing the back of the young woman's head and hand with a red and orange colored image in the center shaped much like a womb. One eye appears in the center and the outline of a nose and lips are present. The border of the entire image is drawn in ink by double lines, and the outline of ears appears in each corner. Similar to Dupor's hamsters in each corner of "I Interesting Hamster" our inability to hear becomes the framework in which our lives are defined. The girl's dual images indicate a splitting of self, and how her self-concept is deplorable to her. Thomson notes: "If. . . disabled people pursue normalization too much, they risk denying limitations and pain for the comfort of others and may edge into the self-betrayal associated with 'passing'" (Thomson 1997: 13). In this painting, we are only shown one eye, as her hand covers the other as well as her nose and mouth. The colored womb center draws the viewer's attention and features the girl's inner eye and center as she stands at the threshold of a valued self identity as a Deaf person. The title, "Suppression," indicates that she is presently in denial of her Deaf identity, struggling with her lack of acceptance. "The cultural other and the cultural self operate together as opposing twin figures that legitimate a system of social, economic, and political empowerment justified by physiological differences" (Thomson 1997: 8).



Fig. 8. *Deaf American, Susan Dupor.*

Dupor's self-portrait entitled "Deaf American" was one of her first De'VIA works. Here she places the viewer in the vantage point of looking down upon her while she holds her stomach with one hand and her hearing aid in her other, outstretched hand. The American flag is hanging behind her as a full backdrop. Although less direct than some of her other works, this piece communicates Dupor's sense of otherness, how she feels she is seen by others.

This self-portrait indicates the confusion and marginalization of being in both Deaf and hearing worlds. When I painted this picture, it was my first year out of NTID and was in a cultural shock being in an all hearing art school. My deafness accentuated psychologically and emotionally at that point. The reason why the hearing aids in my hand, is as if I am suggesting, "Are you looking at me as a person or a Deaf person? Which is more important to you? The hearing aids I wear or my physical being?" This was inspired by the many incidents riding on the EL train in Chicago, people would stare at my hearing aids while standing or sitting down quietly minding my own business. They would stare as if a knife stabbed me (Dupor personal communication 2000).

Resistance art serves as a very important social vehicle to express rage for people who have been powerless and often suffocated with fear of the consequences of resisting in other ways. Through resistance art, the articulation of unspoken rage allows for the possibility to evolve politically and socially from victimization to affirmation and activism. As a Jeff McWhinney is quoted by Lane, "[t]o destroy the dangerous relationship between hearing people's control and deaf people's learned inadequacy, we have to overcome our own fear of helplessness in the face of the apparent power of hearing people" (Lane 1992: 97). Dupor explains, "[m]y earlier works show a lot of activism-now the works I'm creating seem to reveal community action with more attention to the Deaf children's natural upbringing or mockery of their upbringing in an inclusive [mainstream] setting." Through this very public and accessible resistance, De'VIA serves as a forum under which collective and holistic questing begins, as Deaf people shift from object to subject.

Because of the boldness of Miller and Dupor's work, they have both been harshly received by some.

Many times deaf or hearing audiences can immediately relate to my paintings employing D/deaf themes. Also, I strive to take the eyes of hearing people and show them what it is like to live in a deaf or Deaf world. Sometimes hearing people deny some of my paintings thinking it's farce; in deaf education history hearing educators and parents felt responsible to woefully help deaf people. Sometimes my paintings are like whiplash, having some of them realize their benevolence has become menacing. Some deaf will smirk in agreement with the arts' theme of mocking irony (Dupor personal communication 1998).

MILLER AND DUPOR'S AFFIRMATION ART: CULTURAL PRIDE VIA ASL



Fig. 9. *Growing in ASL*, Betty G. Miller.

Miller's "Growing in ASL" is a richly-colored work which features a hand in three different placements as if signing GROWING. All the colors are warm and inviting, and the size of the hands are full and natural as opposed to her other works that feature hand motifs that are stiff, rigid, broken, or disproportionate. The artwork and the title emanate a very positive and affirming message that ASL is natural, beautiful, and desirable. The recognition of ASL as a full-fledged language in the 1960s by Dr. William Stokoe, a hearing professor of English at Gallaudet University, was a watershed for Deaf pride and empowerment. The 1960s are seen as a time of re-birth for Deaf communities where ASL was utilized and celebrated. The National Theatre of the Deaf was created, and Deaf people began to value and cherish their heritage and cultural experiences, which for so long had existed underground. As Miller says, "one aspect of my work...shows the beauty of Deaf culture and American Sign Language. I hope this work, and the understanding that may arise from this visual expression, will help bridge the gap between the Deaf world, and the hearing world' (Schertz 1995: 7)

Dupor's oil painting on wax entitled "Cookie" displays a young child in double image in order to



Fig. 10. *Cookie*, Susan Dupor.

show the production of a sign, which requires movement. In the background are bear and clown-shaped cookie jars. In contrast to Dupor's other works that show children in child-like settings that are menacing or unnatural, this is a joyful work with rich and inviting colors, and the child is comfortably signing COOKIE with shining and hopeful eyes. This piece indicates both an ease and great sense of joy about being Deaf and using ASL. From the point of view of thematic analysis, this affectively very positive image represents Deaf people as agents rather than victims.

SELF-WORTH AND CULTURAL AFFILIATION



Fig. 11. *Birth of a Deaf Woman*, Betty G. Miller.

Miller's breathtaking "Birth of a Deaf Woman" with its hues of pink, blue, and purple merges many different meanings. The colors chosen may indicate a balance of the feminine and masculine in each of us. I interpret the nude woman in the painting to be a rejection of the popular American cultural idealized images of the desirable female shape and a celebration of the natural curves and plumpness of motherhood. The woman is about to sign the word BIRTH and is looking downward. Her face is minimized while her breasts, hands, and hips are embellished. The viewer's eyes focus on the hands, which seem to be moving to a position to cradle an infant. This inspiring painting engages Glickman's fourth stage of identity formation, that of a bicultural identity. The woman gives birth to her self—a whole person with a fully-developed sense of self worth and cultural affiliation as a woman and a Deaf person. For the disenfranchised, especially those lacking parents or teachers of the same cultural group, the transition into adulthood is often an especially difficult journey. With Miller's work we clearly

have seen a transformation through the years in themes and mediums as her rage was given voice through her work, allowing for other emotions to find a voice, too.



Fig. 12. *Elysium*, Susan Dupor.

The last piece to be discussed is Dupor's "Elysium," which means paradise or Utopia. This majestic painting is of four Deaf women under a purple starlit night in the woods around a campfire. The canvas itself is in the shape of a half sphere that gives it an organic feel of the earth and sky. The two pairs of women are signing to each other in an engaging interchange. The glow reflected from the unseen fire communicates a sense of warmth and peacefulness. This snapshot of solidarity through a common language, gender, and cultural experience conveys a strong sense of tranquility, euphoria, self-worth and belonging through the ease and comfort with which these women converse. Nature and naturalness are the emphasis here. The title itself provides some insight into what Dupor was thinking as she created this work—desiring to capture a perfect moment/world where no interpreters were needed, no overt oppression was experienced, and information and human connection were free and open. When Thomson talks of Audre Lorde, a nearly blind, African-American lesbian, poet and author, she makes this observation, "[i]f her physical difference is the source of her social alienation, she also makes it the source of her poetic and erotic affirmation. Such self-authorization, Lorde insists, is a political and personal act of survival, a 'transformation of silence into language and action' that achieves significant cultural work" (Thomson 1997: 127).

While gender did not appear to be a focal point of Miller's resistance art, it is a shared image of both Miller's and Dupor's affirmation art, indicating that sex and Deaf identity are dual statuses that ensure the artists' holistic self-acceptance. Both identify themselves strongly as being Deaf women artists, emphasizing the importance of their gender to them. In her work, "Pussy," Dupor has explored issues of sexism within the Deaf community where sexually-related signs are more graphic and often more offensive when describing women. She has also examined sexuality and the hearingization of young Deaf women in her work "Rape and Her Little Bambis." Dupor states, "[a]s an artist who is Deaf, I am constantly exploring my identity as a Deaf woman. I have been painting within this theme for the past ten years, and my perspective has changed throughout the years" (Schertz 1999:7). While Miller's work does not focus on gender issues, several of her works feature women and girls, and she recently shared that "[t]oday..I still am doing some artwork based on oppression, but I am now working on new artwork, trying to express myself as a Deaf woman and a lesbian" (Miller personal communication 2000).

RAGE AND THE SECRET OF JOY

Many people have expressed some surprise and discomfort with the number of resistance artwork pieces that Dr. Betty G. Miller and Susan Dupor have produced in comparison with other Deaf View/Image Art artists who have a stronger collection of affirmation pieces. It is fascinating to me, as this is what drew me to their works — the volume and poignancy within their pieces. Susan B. Anthony has often been quoted for having said, "[c]autious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform." I am an admirer of both Miller's and Dupor's work because of their strong convictions, daringness, and their artistic talents. Because I, too, like many others, have felt that rage of injustice but felt paralyzed to do anything with it — feeling it inhibit and corrupt the joys that lie within me as well. Given the backgrounds of these two artists and many of us Deaf and hard of hearing people and drawing from a description of Black rage as described by bell hooks, we may reach a deeper understanding of how this has come to be. When reading the following quote, it may be useful to mentally replace the term Black with Deaf and white with hearing. Speaking of middle class, educated Blacks, hooks states:

Their rage erupts because they have spent so much time acquiescing to white power to achieve -assimilating, changing themselves, suppressing true feelings. Their rage surfaces because they make these changes believing that doing so will mean they will be accepted as equals. When they are not treated as equals by the whites they have admired, subordinated their integrity to, they are shocked (hooks 1995: 28).

However, Miller and Dupor do not allow this shock and rage to express itself in an unhealthy or harmful manner. Nor do they repress it as so many Deaf and hard of hearing people do. This self-repression is an outcome of the intense fear of the political power bearing people hold over Deaf people's lives, work, and autonomy. Lane states, "[W]hen the audist is unmasked for the deaf person, dependence is no longer tolerable. The dependent's inferior standing seems a gross injustice. There is a clear standard of justice: The treatment providers afford each other. The former dependent now insists on that treatment — equality. 'The slave returns the look of the master. In this moment a man is born' (Lane 1992: 98).

Dupor and Miller have chosen expressive means for telling our history in a way "that enables political self-recovery" (hooks 1995:47). Other De'VIA artists, who may have been raised more STRONG-DEAF (ASL sign for those with Deaf parents. Deaf residential schooling, and native ASL users), may be less in-touch with their rage at oppression and injustice. Or, they may be more in touch with the affirmation aspect of their upbringing, as their experience may parallel an "underclass black person who has never trusted white people or endeavored to please them to receive rewards" (hooks 1995:28). STRONG-DEAF people were not raised within the dominant culture as an elite or selected group or trained to aspire to be as hearing-like as possible.

While all artists and art genres will continue to change, it is interesting to note the similarities in Dupor's and Miller's life experiences and how rage and joy have shaped them and their work.

When I was in college I was angry, and my paintings at that time were angry. I was confused about the two worlds and which one I belong in. I felt my upbringing had sheltered me in

some way. Now I'm not angry anymore, I've accepted that the two worlds are the way they are. I'm not mad about my upbringing. It is what molded me and made my life unique. Nowadays as a teacher at the Deaf School, I sense less oppression and tension among the students there. There is a daily contentedness to see that the students are lively, happy and complete. (Dupor personal communication 2000;

As for Miller, she says, "In the early 1970s...there was a lot of anger projected in my artwork, which was therapeutic.. showing my anger based on my experiences as a Deaf person-.and oppression displayed in many places where I live, and work" (Miller personal communication 1998)

In Alice Walker's book. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the reader is at times mortified, spellbound, and shocked at the trials and tribulations an African woman experiences as the result of genital mutilation. Just as Walker uses her craft to make political statements and to call our attention to outrage, oppression, and injustice, so do Miller and Dupor. And, just as the lead character in Walker's novel discovers, so too do these De'VIA artists—resistance is the secret to possessing joy (Walker 1992: 286).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the existence of affirmation and resistance art within De'VIA is critical as both avenues function as a gauge and a visual testimony of political progress and social change, call the viewer to reflection and action, and facilitate the formation of a strong, positive bicultural identity. Deaf View/Image Art is an accessible way to preserve Deaf culture by serving as a pictorial text of the Deaf experience—oppression and empowerment alike. As any educator will attest-knowledge is power. The inclusion of Deaf View/Image Art into Deaf Studies, Deaf Education, ASL and interpreter training curriculum can foster greater discussion, discourse and discovery in this art movement and to enhance a deeper understanding of Deaf history and Deaf culture.

Deaf Art expresses the values of Deaf culture: the beauty of sign language and its painful oppression, the joys of Deaf bonding, communication breakdowns between signers and non-signers, the discovery of language and community, and the history of Deaf people. Deaf Art or, more precisely, Deaf View/Image Art, is a genre that uses formal art elements to express the "innate cultural or physical deaf experience." Deaf Art is created when the artist intends to express his or her Deaf experience through visual art. [Schertz 2000: 2]

As we have seen from this delimited analysis of the resistance and affirmation art of two artists within the De'VIA school, close attention to the symbolic language, representations, and messages of the artists offers a rich source of knowledge of the Deaf experience. Continued attention to other aspects outside the scope of this study concerning sexism and gender issues, language rights, and pedagogical practices represented in the visual art of Deaf people are significant for several reasons. First, the De'VIA school and the art of others from nondominant social groups gives visual "voice" to social injustices that a moral society needs to acknowledge. Also, these perspectives arise from rich veins of experience and sources of creativity that render them a social good in themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge several key people for their assistance, support and encouragement in creating this article: Susan Dupor and Dr. Betty G. Miller; background research and interviews: Leigh-Anne Francis, Paula Grcevic and Brenda Schertz; editing: Dr. Karen Christie, Laksmi Fjord, and Stephen Jacobs.

NOTES

1. As is customary in most publications discussing Deaf culture and people who are deaf, the use of capital D in Deaf is used in this article to recognize Deaf people as a cultural entity. The lower-case d in deaf is utilized when referring to the audiological condition of deafness.
2. The article draws a great deal from Rosemarie Garland Thomson in her book *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. It also relies on concepts, paradigms and theories challenged and examined in bell hooks' *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* and Harian Lane's *Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community*.
3. ABC and number stories are specialized forms of ASL literature in which letters of the manual alphabet or signed numbers are used in an unique order to create a story or poem.
4. Carol Padden's and Tom Humphries' book *Deaf in America: Voices from Culture*, Sherman Wilcox's *American Deaf Culture: An Anthology*, Harian Lane's *Mask of Benevolence* and *Journey into Deaf-World* with Hoffmeister and Bahan cover this concept in depth as do many other books and articles on Deaf culture.
5. Deaf President Now (DPN) occurred when Deaf students at Gallaudet University and community members demanded the appointment of a Deaf president to preside over the only Deaf liberal arts college in the U.S in 1989.
6. Drawn largely from the Black Identity Development Scale by William Cross, Neil Glickman explores Deaf Identity Development theories and scales in Chapter 1: *What is Culturally Affirmative Psychotherapy* and Chapter 5: *The Development of Culturally Deaf Identities* in the book he edited with Michael Harvey entitled *Culturally Affirmative Psychotherapy with Deaf Persons*.

REFERENCES

- Baird. Chuck Crawford
1995 *Chuck Baird: 35 Plates*. San Diego, CA: DawnSignPress.
- Bell, Alexander Graham
1883 *Fallacies Concerning the Deaf, and the Influence of Such Fallacies in Preventing the Amelioration of their Condition*. Wahsington: Judd & Detweiler.
- 1991 *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*, LA: Wright Art Gallery. University of California.
- Cummins, J., & Danesi, M.
1990 *Heritage Languages: The Development and Denial of Canada's Linguistic*. Montreal, Quebec: Our Schools / Our Selves Education Foundation.

Dupor, Susan
 1998 to 2000 Personal communication.

Gannon, Jack R.
 1981 Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America. Silver Springs, MD: National Association of the Deaf.

Glickman, N. & Harvey, M.
 1996 Culturally Affirmative Psychotherapy with Deaf Persons. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Helene, Amy
 1995 Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, And the Harlem Renaissance, Jackson: University of Mississippi.

hooks, bell
 1995 Killing Rage: Ending Racism. NY: Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin
 1971 Harlem Renaissance. NY: Oxford University Press.

Humphries, Tom
 1991 An Introduction to the Culture of Deaf People in the United States: Content Notes and Reference Materials for Teachers. In Sign Language Studies, Fall 1991, Vol. 72, p. 209 - 240.

Johnston, P., Miller, B., Baird, C., Wilhite, A., Ho L., Creighton, N., Wonder, G., Inches-Vasnick, S., Sonnenstrahl, D.
 1989 Manifesto of De'VIA and Presentation.

Lane, Harlan
 1992 Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community. NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Lane, H., Hoffmeister, R., & Bahan, B.
 1996 A Journey Into the Deaf-World. San Diego, CA, DawnSignPress. Listisard, Michele

1997 Neon, Sunflower & Double Illusions: Betty Miller Continues to Grow as an Artist and Advocate. In Deaf Life magazine May 1997.

Miller, Betty G.
 1998-2000 Personal communication.

1989 De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art). In the Deaf Way: Perspectives From the International Conference on Deaf Culture. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Moore, M. & Panara, R.
 1996 Great Deaf Americans. The Second Edition, Rochester, NY: Deaf Life Press.

2000 Newswaves editorial, Rochester, NY: Newswaves, March 15, 2000, p. 8.

Padden, C. & Humphries, T.
 1988 Deaf In America: Voices from a Culture. Cambridge Harvard Press.

Schertz, Brenda
 1995 Deaf Artists' Exhibit Gallery Guide: Deaf Studies
 IV Conference. Boston, MA. Schertz, Brenda Deaf Artists' Exhibit Gallery Guide: Deaf Studies
 VI
 Conference. Oakland, CA. Schertz, Brenda National Touring Exhibit of Deaf Culture Art Gallery
 Guide - Elements of a Culture: Visions by Deaf
 Artists. Rochester, NY. Sonnenstrahl, Deborah

1996 De'VIA—What An Odd Word!: A Historical
 Perspective. In Deaf American Monograph. Silver
 Spring, MD: NAD. Thomson, R.G.

1997 *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. NY: Columbia University Press. Walker, Alice 1992 *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. Wilcox, Sherman (editor) 1989 *American Deaf Culture: An Anthology*. Burtonsville, MD: Linstok Press.